

TOLSTOY'S ANSWER TO THE RIDDLE OF LIFE.

AN AMERICAN ADMIRER OF TOLSTOY.

ERNEST Howard Crosby has been called Tolstoy's leading disciple in America, and truly no one has shown himself a more devoted friend to the venerable Russian reformer whose picture our author places before us in the following words¹:

"A strange figure—this peasant nobleman, this aristocrat, born into the ruling class of an autocracy, who condemns all government and caste, this veteran of two wars who proscribes all bloodshed, this keen sportsman turned vegetarian, this landlord who follows Henry George, this man of wealth who will have nothing to do with money, this famous novelist who thinks that he wasted his time in writing most of his novels, this rigid moralist, one of whose books at least, the *Kreutzer Sonata*, was placed under the ban of the American Post Office. That same dramatic instinct which made him a great novelist, which impelled Sir Henry Irving to rank his two plays among the best of the past century, and which, as we have seen, has so often led him to find lessons in the active world around him, this same instinct has made of this least theatrical and most self-forgetful of men the dramatic prefigurement in his own person of a reunited race, set free by love from the shackles of caste and violence. As it was with the prophets of old, so with him, there is a deeper significance in his life, in the tragedy of himself, than in the burden of his spoken message."

Mr. Crosby's enthusiasm for this prophet of peace and goodwill on earth finds utterance in the following lines²:

"Hail, Tolstoy, bold, archaic shape,
Rude pattern of the man to be,
From 'neath whose rugged traits escape
Hints of a manhood fair and free.

"I read a meaning in your face,
A message wafted from above,
Prophetic of an equal race
Fused into one by robust love.

¹ *Tolstoy and His Message*, by Ernest H. Crosby, pp. 92-93.

² Quoted from *Plain Talk in Psalm and Parable*.

- " Like some quaint statue long concealed,
 Deep buried in Mycenæ's mart,
 Wherein we clearly see revealed
 The promise of Hellenic art,
- " So stand you ; while aloof and proud,
 The world that scribbles, prates, and frets
 Seems but a simpering, futile crowd
 Of Dresden china statuettes.
- " Like John the Baptist, once more scan
 The signs that mark the dawn of day.
 Forerunner of the Perfect Man,
 Make straight His path, prepare the way.
- " The desert too is your abode,
 Your garb and fare of little worth ;
 Thus ever has the Spirit showed
 The coming reign of heaven on earth.
- " Not in king's houses may we greet
 The prophets whom the world shall bless,
 To lay my verses at your feet
 I seek you in the wilderness."

And, indeed, Tolstoy is a remarkable man in spite of much that may be called one-sided and eccentric. Tolstoy, in his rugged originality and with his independence of thought, is and will remain forever a most unique personality. We will here let Tolstoy speak for himself, selecting from Mr. Crosby's books Tolstoy's solution of the problem of life, his view of the soul, and its destiny after death, which is Christian in spirit, explaining the argument of Tolstoy's belief in the doctrine of non-resistance, and at the same time closely resembles the Buddhist conception of Nirvâna.

TOLSTOY'S PHILOSOPHY.¹

"We should begin our researches with that which we alone know with certitude, and this is the 'I' within us. Life is what I feel in myself, and this life science cannot define. Nay, it is my idea of life rather which determines what I am to consider as science, and I learn all outside of myself solely by the extension of my knowledge of my own mind and body. We know from within that man lives only for his own happiness, and his aspiration towards it and his pursuit of it constitute his life. At first he is conscious of the life in himself alone, and hence he imagines that the good which he seeks must be his own individual good. His

¹ Quoted from Mr. Crosby's *Tolstoy and His Message*, pp. 36 ff.

own life seems the real life, while he regards the life of others as a mere phantom. He soon finds out that other men take the same view of the world, and that the life in which he shares is composed of a vast number of individuals, each bent on securing its own welfare, and consequently doing all it can to thwart and destroy the others. He sees that in such a struggle it is almost hopeless for him to contend, for all mankind is against him. If, on the other hand, he succeeds by chance in carrying out his plans for happiness, he does not even then enjoy the prize as he anticipated. The older he grows, the rarer become the pleasures; ennui, satiety, trouble and suffering go on increasing; and before him lie old age, infirmity and death. He will go down to the grave, but the world will continue to live.

“The real life, then, is the life outside him, and his own life, which originally appeared to him the one thing of importance, is after all a deception. The good of the individual is an imposture, and if it could be obtained it would cease at death. The life of man as an individuality seeking his own good, in the midst of an infinite host of similar individualities engaged in bringing one another to naught and being themselves annihilated in the end, is an evil and an absurdity. It cannot be the true life.

“Our quandary arises from looking upon our animal life as the real life. Our real life begins with the waking of our consciousness, at the moment when we perceive that life lived for self cannot produce happiness. We feel that there must be some other good. We make an effort to find it, but, failing, we fall back into our old ways. These are the first throes of the birth of the veritable human life. This new life only becomes manifest when the man once for all renounces the welfare of his animal individuality as his aim in life. By so doing he fulfils the law of reason, the law which we all are sensible of within us—the same universal law which governs the nutrition and reproduction of beast and plant.

“Our real life is our willing submission to this law, and not, as science would have us hold, the involuntary subjection of our bodies to the laws of organic existence. Self-renunciation is as natural to man as it is for birds to use their wings instead of their feet; it is not a meritorious or heroic act; it is simply the necessary condition precedent of genuine human life. This new human life exhibits itself in our animal existence just as animal life does in matter. Matter is the instrument of animal life, not an obstacle to it; and so our animal life is the instrument of our higher human life and should conform to its behests.

"Life, then, is the activity of the animal individuality working in submission to the law of reason. Reason shows man that happiness cannot be obtained by a selfish life, and leaves only one outlet open for him, and that is Love. Love is the only legitimate manifestation of life. It is an activity which has for its object the good of others. When it makes its appearance, the meaningless strife of the animal life ceases.

"Real love is not the preference of certain persons whose presence gives one pleasure. This, which is ordinarily called love, is only a wild stock on which true love may be grafted, and true love does not become possible until man has given up the pursuit of his own welfare. Then at last all the juices of his life come to nourish the noble graft, while the trunk of the old tree, the animal individuality, pours into it its entire vigor. Love is the preference which we accord to other beings over ourselves. It is not a burst of passion, obscuring the reason, but on the contrary no other state of the soul is so rational and luminous, so calm and joyous; it is the natural condition of children and the wise.

"Active love is attainable only for him who does not place his happiness in his individual life, and who also gives free play to his feeling of good-will towards others. His well-being depends upon love as that of a plant on light. He does not ask what he should do, but he gives himself up to that love which is within his reach. He who loves in this way alone possesses life. Such self-renunciation lifts him from animal existence in time and space into the regions of life. The limitations of time and space are incompatible with the idea of real life. To attain to it man must trust himself to his wings.

"Man's body changes; his states of consciousness are successive and differ from each other; what then is the 'I'? Any child can answer when he says, 'I like this; I don't like that.' The 'I' is that which likes—which loves. It is the exclusive relationship of a man's being with the world, that relation which he brings with him from beyond time and space. It is said that in his extreme old age, St. John the Apostle had the habit of repeating continually the words, 'Brethren, love one another.' His animal life was nearly gone, absorbed in a new being for which the flesh was already too narrow. For the man who measures his life by the growth of his relation of love with the world, the disappearance at death of the limitations of time and space is only the mark of a higher degree of light.

"My brother, who is dead, acts upon me now more strongly

than he did in life ; he even penetrates my being and lifts me up towards him. How can I say that he is dead? Men who have renounced their individual happiness never doubt their immortality. Christ knew that He would continue to live after His death because He had already entered into the true life which cannot cease. He lived even then in the rays of that other centre of life toward which He was advancing, and He saw them reflected on those who stood around Him. And this every man who renounces his own good beholds ; he passes in this life into a new relation with the world for which there is no death ; on one side he sees the new light, on the other he witnesses its actions on his fellows after being refracted through himself ; and this experience gives him an immovable faith in the stability, immortality, and eternal growth of life. Faith in immortality cannot be received from another ; you cannot convince yourself of it by argument. To have this faith you must have immortality ; you must have established with the world in the present life the new relation of life, which the world is no longer wide enough to contain."